During your appointment you may hear several terms you are unfamiliar with, below is a glossary of terms to help you understand what your physician is discussing.

Access: a way to enter the body. Accesses to the bloodstreams for hemodialysis are fistulas, grafts, and permacaths. Access to the peritoneal cavity for peritoneal dialysis is a catheter.

Acute: occurring suddenly or over a short period of time.

Acute renal failure: a sudden and severe decrease in kidney function that may be short term.

Anemia: low red blood cell count; symptoms may include shortness of breath, lack of energy or fatigue

Arteriovenous Graft (AVG): a piece of artificial tubing that is attached on one end of an artery and on the other end to a vein. The tube is placed entirely under the skin and the tube itself is used for dialysis.

Arteriovenous Fistula (AVF): a type of access that is created by a vascular surgeon by surgically joining an artery and a vein so that the vein enlarges due to the flow of arterial blood. An AVF takes at least 4-6 weeks to mature before being able to use it for dialysis.

Blood count: the number of red blood cells, white blood cells or platelets in a given sample of blood.

Blood pressure: the force of blood pushing against the inner walls of the blood vessels. Goal blood pressure is below 140/90

Blood Urea Nitrogen: Urea Nitrogen comes from the breakdown of protein in the foods you eat and is excreted by the kidneys. A normal BUN level is between 7-20, as kidney function decreases the BUN level raises.

Calcium: a mineral that is important for strong bones, blood clotting, nerve and muscle functioning and the activation of certain enzymes. Kidney patients should not take calcium pills without talking to your doctor first.

Chronic: a term that is used to describe a disease of long duration or one that is progressing slowly.

Chronic disease: a disease or disorder that lasts many years (or forever) and may get worse over time.

Chronic kidney disease (CKD): the loss of kidney function that is usually progressive in nature and cannot be reversed but it can be managed. If left untreated, kidney disease can lead to kidney failure. It means your kidneys cannot work as well as healthy kidneys. There are 5 stages of chronic kidney disease.

Complete blood count (CBC): a series of tests to examine components of blood. These tests are useful in diagnosing certain health problems and following the effects of treatments.

Creatinine: is a waste product that comes from the normal wear and tear on muscles of the body and is removed by the kidneys. As kidney function decreases, the level of creatinine in the blood rises.

CT scan: diagnostic X-Ray procedure in which a computer is used to generate a three-dimensional image.

Diabetes: a disorder in which the body cannot make insulin or cannot use it properly. Insulin is a hormone that controls how much sugar is in your blood.

Diagnosis: the process of identifying a disease by its characteristic signs, symptoms, and lab findings.

Glomerular Filtration Rate (GFR): a measure of kidney function. It tells you how well your kidneys work. It also helps determine the stage of chronic kidney disease.

Hematocrit: a measure of the red blood cells your body is making. A low hematocrit can mean you have anemia.

Hemodialysis (HD): a procedure that filters waste products and extra water from your blood. It is one of the main treatments for kidney failure.

Hemoglobin: the iron-protein component in the red blood cells that carry oxygen from your lungs to all parts of your body. Your hemoglobin levels tell your doctors if you have anemia.

High blood pressure: the force of blood pushing against the inner walls of the blood vessels is too high.

Hyponatremia: is a condition that occurs when the level of sodium in your blood is abnormally low. Symptoms are nonspecific but can include mental changes, headache, nausea, vomiting, tiredness, muscle spasms and seizures.

Inherited: something you were born with and get from your mother or father, like red hair or blue eyes.

Kidneys: two bean-shaped located at the back of the abdominal cavity, one on each side. Kidneys clean the blood, help make red blood cells, and keep bones healthy.

Kidney biopsy: is performed by using a needle to take small tissue samples of the kidney which will be used for examination under a microscope by a pathologist.

Kidney failure: the loss of all kidney function and it cannot be reversed. It means your kidneys have stopped working.

Kidney Transplant: an operation to put a healthy kidney from a person is placed in someone else who has kidney failure. A kidney transplant can be from a living donor or a deceased (cadaver) donor.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI): a technique that uses magnetic fields and radio waves linked to a computer to create pictures of areas inside the body

Nephrotic syndrome: symptoms include high levels of protein in the urine, a lack of protein in the blood. A 24 hour urine may need to be collected to confirm diagnosis.

Organ: a part of your body that does an important job. For example, the heart, kidneys, and liver are organs.

Parathyroid Hormone (PTH): high levels of parathyroid hormone may results from a poor balance of calcium and phosphorus in your body. This can cause bone disease.

Peritoneal dialysis (PD): a form of dialysis in that a soft plastic tube (catheter) is inserted in the abdomen by surgery. A sterile cleansing fluid is put into your belly through the catheter, the peritoneal membrane acts as a natural filter. After the filtering process is finished the fluid leaves the body through the catheter.

Phosphorus: a mineral found in your bones, it works with calcium and vitamin D to keep your bones healthy and help nerves and muscles work. A high phosphorus level can lead to weak bones and hardening of the arteries.

Polycystic kidney disease (PKD): a hereditary disease that involves the growth of multiple cysts on kidney tissue.

Potassium: a mineral in your blood that helps your heart and muscles work properly. A potassium level that is too high or too low may weaken muscles or cause deadly changes in heart rhythm. As your kidney disease worsens your doctor may put you on a low potassium diet.

Proteinuria: the presence of an abnormal amount of protein in the urine caused by filters damanaged b kidney disease. It can also be a result of overproduction of proteins in the body.

Red blood cells: cells in your blood that carry oxygen to all parts of your body.

Risk factors: something that increases your risk. For example, diabetes increases your risk for kidney disease.

Sodium: a mineral found in the body that helps regulate the body's fluid content, maintain normal blood pressure, and supports the work of your nerves and muscles.

Symptoms: a change in your body that alerts you that something is wrong. It may mean you have an illness or disease.

Treatment plan: a plan of medical care to help you get well, or to keep an illness or disease from getting worse.

Ultrasound: a diagnostic technique in which pictures are made by bouncing safe, painless sound waves off organs and other internal structures.

Ureters: two tubes that carry urine (pee) from the kidney to the bladder.

Urethra: a tube that carries urine (pee) from the bladder to outside of the body.

Urinalysis: a microscopic examination of a urine sample as well as a dipstick test. A urinalysis can help to detect a variety of kidney and urinary tract disorders.

Urinary system (also called "Urinary tract"): a system in your body that includes the kidneys, ureters, bladder, and urethra. It acts as a plumbing system to drain urine (pee) from the kidneys, store it, and then release it when you urinate.

Urine: a yellowish liquid made by the kidneys. Your kidneys make urine as a way to remove waste products and extra water that your body doesn't need.

Venous Catheter: a plastic tube that is inserted into a large vein, usually in the neck. Because the catheter is exposed to the elements it has a higher rate of infection. Also called Permacath or dialysis port they are generally considered temporary accesses and are usually only placed when urgent dialysis is needed.

Vitamin D deficiency: can affect your bones and overall health. Your doctor may put you on a prescription vitamin d or an over-the-counter vitamin d to help raise your vitamin d level.